

Our Top Education Issues represent the Public School Forum’s policy agenda for the 2023-24 biennium.

- 1** Ensure fair and competitive compensation for educators.
- 2** Grow, retain, and diversify the teacher pipeline.
- 3** Address the root causes of mental health and school safety crises.
- 4** Prepare students for the world they live in.
- 5** Implement, monitor, and evaluate the Comprehensive Remedial Plan.

Public School Forum Core Policy Priorities

These ongoing policy priorities encompass what we stand for and what we work to achieve. These priorities guide the development of our Top Education Issues each biennium.

Ongoing Policy Priorities



Recognize and value public education as a public good



Provide safe, supportive, inclusive schools for each and every child



Fully and equitably fund public schools



Recruit and retain a highly effective, diverse educator workforce



Eliminate the opportunity gap

Top Education Issues 2023-24

Public schools are the cornerstone of our communities, our democracy, and our economy. We must put aside political differences and put our students at the center of policy decisions to secure a better future for our state. The challenges and deep inequities facing our schools today are largely the result of decades of disinvestment, compounded by a global pandemic. All of this has led us to a breaking point for our system of public education. In 2023, we urge our lawmakers and stakeholders to recognize the responsibility we all have to act quickly to meet the needs of each and every student in North Carolina.

1

Ensure fair and competitive compensation for educators.

- North Carolina ranks 38th in the nation in teacher pay with an average salary of \$53,458¹ in 2020-21.² Beginning teacher pay in NC starts at \$37,000, falling 17% below Alabama³ and well below the NC minimum living wage of \$48,346.⁴
- Adjusting for inflation, the average teacher salary in NC dropped 11.5% between 1999-2000 to 2020-2021, while the national average salary increased by .3% over the same period.⁵
- Teachers in North Carolina make approximately 24.5% less than similarly educated peers in other sectors. This is one of the largest teacher pay penalties in the nation.⁶

2023-24 Policy Actions



- ✓ Increase state-funded base pay for teachers by 24.5% to reach the national average and eliminate the teacher pay penalty.
- ✓ Compensate teachers for additional duties and workload.
- ✓ Reinstate masters pay for teachers.
- ✓ Provide funding to pay student teachers.
- ✓ Revise the principal pay plan to ensure that compensation is stable and predictable.

2

Address the root causes of mental health and school safety crises.

- In North Carolina, the number of youth suicides has doubled in recent years.⁷ Since the COVID pandemic began, there has been a 46% increase in youth with one or more major depressive episodes.⁸
- North Carolina's ratios of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel to students are far higher than recommended.⁹

School-Based	NC Ratio	Recommended Ratio
Psychologists	1:1,815	1:500
Counselors	1:335	1:250

School-Based	NC Ratio	Recommended Ratio
Social Workers	1:1,025	1:250
Nurses	1:890	1:750

- Since Columbine, more than 236,000 K-12 students have experienced gun violence in their schools. Gun violence in schools can have mental health consequences even for those who are not injured or directly exposed.¹⁰
- 4.6 million children in the United States have one or more loaded, unlocked firearm in their homes.¹¹
- Safe, well-maintained school buildings are necessary for student health and academic success.¹² The 2020-21 K-12 facility needs survey calls for \$12.8 billion of investment in school buildings and repairs over five years.¹³

2023-24 Policy Actions



- ✓ Increase students' access to school-based mental health services. Raise salaries for counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses to levels comparable with other states and practitioners in other settings.
- ✓ Provide funding for professional development in trauma-informed practices for educators.
- ✓ Examine codes of conduct, eliminate use of nebulous discipline categories, and end exclusionary and inequitable discipline practices. Direct attention toward creating positive school culture, building accountability through relationships, and practicing conflict resolution and repair.
- ✓ Pass a state statute requiring safe storage of firearms. Reinstate the federal ban on assault weapons and require universal background checks for gun purchases in all 50 states.
- ✓ Close the nearly \$13 billion funding gap to address school facilities needs across the state.

3 **Grow, retain and diversify the teacher pipeline.**

- Teacher licensure exams, such as PRAXIS Core, can serve as a barrier for the recruitment and retention of a diverse teacher workforce¹⁴ and are not necessarily predictive of teacher quality.¹⁵
- Teacher vacancies topped 3,600 at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year. Districts also reported that more than 3,600 certified teaching roles were filled by staff who were not fully licensed to teach in NC. Vacancies spanned all grade levels and subjects, and increased significantly from the previous year.¹⁶
- Teacher diversity is linked to increased graduation rates, improved attendance and suspension rates,¹⁷ and social-emotional and academic gains for all students.¹⁸ However, the teacher workforce in NC is not representative of the student population.¹⁹

..... **2023-24 Policy Actions**



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Eliminate requirements for teacher licensure exams that are not predictive of educator effectiveness, i.e. PRAXIS Core. ✓ Open the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program to prospective teachers in all subject areas and structure financial support as scholarships, rather than forgivable loans. ✓ Increase the diversity and number of National Board Certified Teachers by | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reimbursing certification fees and providing support for teachers of color during the process. ✓ Collect more actionable data on teacher satisfaction, disaggregated by race, on the Teacher Working Conditions Survey to better inform recruitment and retention efforts. ✓ Provide flexibility in how districts can utilize position allotments to address instructional needs. |
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4 **Prepare students for the world they live in.**

- Social-emotional learning (SEL) builds critical skills of empathy, self-management, communication, and relationship-building,²⁰ all of which are aligned with the NC Department of Public Instruction’s Portrait of a Graduate.²¹
- Culturally responsive pedagogy can improve students’ brain processing, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, strengthen their racial and ethnic identities, promote feelings of safety and belonging, and increase engagement and motivation.²²
- The current A-F School Performance Grades, which are calculated using a formula based 80 percent on proficiency and 20 percent on growth over time, are more indicative of the percentage of students living in poverty than a measure of student learning.²³

..... **2023-24 Policy Actions**



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure that standards and curriculum reflect the diversity of student identities and address historical truths and systemic inequities that persist today. ✓ Provide funding for preparation and ongoing professional development in culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogy and social emotional learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Implement robust SEL and equity plans in every district, as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ✓ Replace A-F school grades with an accountability model with multiple measures that emphasizes growth, equity, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills. |
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5

Implement, monitor, and evaluate the Comprehensive Remedial Plan.

- The NC Supreme Court has ruled in the *Leandro* case that North Carolina is not fulfilling its constitutional duty to provide every student with a sound basic education.
- North Carolina ranks 48th in the country on per-student spending when adjusting for regional cost differences, falling more than \$4,600 below the national average.²⁴
- Our state ranks 50th in the nation on funding effort, or the amount of funding per student relative to the state’s wealth overall.²⁵
- The Comprehensive Remedial Plan is law, and implementation of the plan will provide additional funding for evidence-based supports for teacher and principal recruitment and retention, early childhood education, literacy instruction, and mental health. This will have an immediate impact on students, schools, and districts across the state, particularly those with the greatest need.²⁶

2023-24 Policy Actions



- ✓ Transfer funds for years 2 and 3 of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan (supplementing, not supplanting), and provide support for districts to efficiently and appropriately distribute and manage the influx of new funds.
- ✓ Build on progress by fully funding investments for years 4 and 5 of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan in the new state budget (supplementing, not supplanting).
- ✓ Track data on progress towards providing a sound basic education for every child over time, with a focus on equitable opportunities for children from low-income families, students of color, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners.



Our Vision

ALL NORTH CAROLINA CHILDREN shall have the opportunity to **REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL** through equitable and meaningful public education that nourishes our state’s civic and economic vitality.

Our Mission

To inspire **MEANINGFUL ACTION** on **NORTH CAROLINA’S MOST IMPORTANT PUBLIC EDUCATION ISSUES.**



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